



# Maricopa County

Department of Public Health

Division of Epidemiology and BioDefense Preparedness & Response

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December 5, 2003

Dear Parent/Guardian:

**Recently, cases of influenza have been reported among school age children in Maricopa County schools.**

## **What is the flu?**

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs). The flu is different from a cold. Respiratory illnesses, such as influenza, are spread by coughing and sneezing and by not washing hands. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include symptoms such as: •Fever •headache •tiredness •dry cough •sore throat •nasal congestion and body-aches.

## **Who is at risk?**

- Infants aged 6-months and older at risk for getting a serious case of influenza.
- Children 6 months to 18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy.
- People with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems.
- Everyone over 50 years of age.
- Residents of long term care facilities.
- Health providers and caretakers of high-risk individuals.
- Women who will be more than 3 months pregnant during the influenza season
- Homeless persons.

## **How can you prevent getting the flu?**

The first line of prevention is the influenza vaccine. The vaccine is recommended for all high-risk people. The vaccine is also encouraged for healthy children 6-23 months of age and adults. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health recommends covering noses and mouths when sneezing and coughing, and frequent hand washing to prevent further spread of influenza.

## **Warning signs to watch for in children includes:**

1. High fever that does not respond to over-the-counter fever medications.
2. If your child has difficulty breathing or shows signs of fast breathing.
3. If your child is not drinking fluids or not keeping fluids down. Prolonged diarrhea can also lead to dehydration.
4. If your child is inconsolable, that is, irritable and cannot be calmed down.
5. If your child is listless or has no interest in playing or other activities.

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Adults and parents with children that show any warning signs should contact their medical providers for assistance. ***Sick children and adults should remain at home and not attend work or school or visit other public places.*** It's not too late in the season to be immunized against influenza. For vaccination locations and times, call 602-263-8856, or go to [www.cir.org](http://www.cir.org).

Lawrence Sands, D.O., M.P.H.

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For more information about influenza, visit

<http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/oids/epi/flu/index.htm> and [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). Maricopa County statistics can be found at [www.maricopa.gov/public\\_health/epi/flu.asp](http://www.maricopa.gov/public_health/epi/flu.asp)